

John Abel joins race for Aurora's next mayor



By Brock Weir

The race to be Aurora's next mayor is now a three-way race with Councillor John Abel joining the running.

The Deputy Mayor filed his papers last week, becoming the third candidate to seek Aurora's top job. He joins incumbent Mayor Geoff Dawe and Councillor Tom Mrakas, who signed up May 1.

'After seven years of being Deputy Mayor, I have come to the realization that politics is about improving the lives of the residents of Aurora, nothing more, nothing less,' says Councillor Abel. 'I am perfectly situated [to do that] having over seven years as Deputy Mayor. It would make absolute sense that I would be ready and willing to assume that role.'

Although Councillor Abel said his vision for Aurora was a 'full plan' that would be rolled out during the campaign itself, he said that part of that vision is the belief that 'any money we're spending would be to the benefit of our residents.'

'If we are spending money and it is not for the benefit, I would not be making that decision.'

To that end, Councillor Abel has said he will re-issue his notice of motion asking for a full report on the benefits a deal with Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute (CFWI) will bring to Aurora.

The motion for the 'economic impact analysis' of the deal was brought forward to Council last month, but it fizzled on the table when it didn't receive a seconder.

The Motion, he said in a statement, came in the wake of April's audit report on the Joint Operations Centre that outlined many improvements that need to be made 'before spending money on large capital projects.'

A Project Management Methodology was recommended, he said, to include an analysis of the economic benefits a project will have on the local community, and the economic benefits of the CFWI deal goes hand in hand with this.

'We have heard several Councillors refer to the spin-off benefits that the Food & Wine Institute will deliver, but we have yet to hear exactly how it will do that,' said Councillor Abel in his statement. 'While Councillors show no hesitation for extolling the virtues of the agreement with Niagara College, they are reluctant or unable to substantiate any of their claims.'

'If transparency and open competition before deals are struck is a genuine aim of an elected body and its members, and if they truly wish to live up to the promises and commitments they made to serve the community's best interests, then they should welcome the idea of an economic impact analysis with open arms. Not only does this conform to the recommendations of the JOC Audit report, it is specifically meant to guide the decisions of policy-makers and inform the public as to whether or not this is a good investment of taxpayers' money.'

Seeking the Mayor's Seat is an opportunity Councillor Abel has been mulling for several months, confirming to The Auroran back in February that it was very much an option on the table.

Between then and now, a number of factors fell in place, he says, that helped solidify his decision.

'The support I have gotten from the community, the business community, and organizations I participate, have all encouraged me to step forward to assume the role of the mayor,' he says. 'There are a number of issues that have not been addressed, and I would be addressing those if I became Mayor. Downtown revitalization, we've all been talking about that and nothing has happened.'

Obviously, we have a huge problem at the GO Station, the lack of parking, and the impact it has on our Heritage District. I think I can provide the leadership that is required to address the issues and I think what I bring to the table is experience and leadership. ?What I really want to champion is affordable housing. There are two reasons: Our children, and I have raised two, can't afford to live in Aurora and new businesses can't afford to live in this community. We need to have rental units and also for our seniors, and we're moving into a huge seniors [population], we need to age in place as we downsize. People shouldn't have to move out of Aurora to find affordable housing. We need more rental units and that is what I am really championing for and it would have a great impact on our community in the long run.?

Councillor Abel was first elected to Aurora Council in 2010.

The position of Deputy Mayor is afforded to the top vote-getter in the Council race, a position Councillor Abel has secured in both of his terms on Council.